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## **U.N.'s "earth Summit" Conference Organizer: 3rd World Foreign Debt Major Obstacle To Environmentally Safe Development**

*by Barbara Khol*

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At a press conference in Geneva on Aug. 8, Maurice Strong, secretary general of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), said the Third World foreign debt is "simply incompatible" with the need to ensure economic development without environmental damage. Strong is in charge of organizing the UN "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro next year. According to Strong, the main challenge is persuading governments to make substantive financial commitments. He said, "The poorest countries are feeding the coffers of the rich. There must be a reversal of the net outflow of resources from the developing countries...This impossible debt burden is robbing them of the ability to deal with environmental issues. I hope governments will realize this is an intolerable situation." In Strong's view, the allocation of "additional financial resources" is difficult at a time when "rich countries have never felt more poor." However, he added, "If we don't get concrete commitments in Rio, when in our generation will we get them?" Strong said funds for environmentally sound projects could come from "redeployment of resources" from, for example, the weapons industry. In the second week of August, the UNCED preparatory committee in Geneva commenced discussion of concrete steps to be adopted at the Rio summit. A controversial proposal to set up a vast computerized data bank system to monitor the environmental performance of individual nations after the summit is on the agenda for Rio. Officials of some Third World governments fear that the information in the proposed data bank could be used against them. In Strong's view, while the proposal is "very radical," it is nonetheless necessary given the "unprecedented risks" faced by all of humanity. Strong praised the Japanese government for special efforts to "dramatically" reduce emissions through a combination of incentives and stringent regulations. Delegations from governments, non-governmental organizations and Green groups will be attending the preparatory conference in Geneva to discuss concrete actions to be included in "Agenda-21." The "Agenda-21," to be adopted in Rio, is to consist of linked steps accepted by all governments in areas such as climate change, forests, oceans, desertification, waste management, toxic dumping, and the need for lifestyle and consumption pattern changes. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 08/08/91)

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